

# European Union Priorities for Cooperation with the Council of Europe

**2020-2022**

Adopted by the Council of the  
European Union on 13<sup>th</sup> July  
2020



EUROPEAN UNION

COUNCIL OF EUROPE



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## INTRODUCTION

At a time of widespread challenges to human rights, democracy, and the rule of law, the EU intends to strengthen its cooperation with the Council of Europe as part of its commitment to promote effective multilateralism and uphold the rules-based international order, especially in the context of the impact of COVID-19.

For this purpose, we must work to preserve and even extend the organisation's pan-European character,

protect its fundamental values and ensure the compliance of its member states with their obligations. Moreover, effectively addressing challenges to human rights arising from digitalisation and artificial intelligence will become crucial.

The EU will continue to support the work of the Council of Europe through contributions to its extra-ordinary budget, cooperation in the legal field, political dialogue as well as the financing of joint programmes targeted at enlargement and neighbouring countries. The EU will also look into possibilities to deepen its fruitful relations with the Council of Europe Development Bank (CEB).

The ECHR accession process was stalled in 2014 due to a negative opinion by the European Court of Justice. In 2019 the EU and the Council of Europe decided to resume accession negotiations.

## HUMAN RIGHTS

- Acceding to the European Convention on Human Rights (ECHR) in order to strengthen the protection of human rights through the creation of a single European legal space.

- Addressing human rights challenges posed by new digital technologies through the promotion of an ethical approach to Artificial Intelligence and digitalisation, as well as strong data protection standards as laid down in the Council of Europe Convention 108.

- Continue close cooperation with the Lanzarote Committee on the protection of children against sexual exploitation and sexual abuse.

- Promoting gender equality and women's rights, including combating violence against women and domestic violence

- Shaping a European legal framework for environmental protection and implementing the European Green Deal drawing on the connection between human rights and the environment.

- Implementing the EU's European Pillar of Social Rights building on the experience of the Council of Europe's European Social Charter.

- Promoting freedom of expression, information and opinion online and offline, as well as access to reliable information.

- Building a humane, more resilient and more effective migration and asylum system.

- Implementing the new Action Plan on Human Rights and Democracy (2020-2024).

## DEMOCRACY

- Promoting an independent civil society, human rights defenders and free media, as well as greater transparency, digital literacy, inclusiveness and civic education.

- Countering manipulative interference and disinformation as provided for by the new European Democracy Action Plan.

- Improving constitutional standards and electoral law relying on the Venice Commission's expertise

- Helping educational systems to equip young people with the necessary competences for promoting human rights, democracy and the rule of law



- Increasing participation and representation of women and the youth in public and political life in collaboration with the Council of Europe.

The Quick Response Mechanism under the joint programme 'Partnership for Good Governance' is among the flagship achievements of the EU-Council of Europe cooperation for democracy. It allows for the Venice Commission to provide ad-hoc legal assistance to the six countries of EU's Eastern Partnership with regards to democratic institutions, rights and freedoms, elections, referenda and political parties, as well as constitutional and ordinary justice.

## RULE OF LAW

- Promoting a rule of law culture and establishing a European Rule of Law Mechanism based on increased synergies with existing Council of Europe mechanisms, including the Venice Commission and the Group of States against Corruption (GRECO).



- Fostering the rule of law in enlargement and EU's neighbourhood countries by supporting justice reform, fighting corruption, and promoting fundamental human rights as well as independent media and civil society.

In 2019 the EU obtained observer status to Council of Europe's anti-corruption body GRECO. Despite not having a formal vote, the EU is allowed to attend the group's meetings and consult its documents.

- Promoting the Budapest Convention on Cybercrime and its additional protocols as a framework for international cooperation and capacity building.



The achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) of the United Nations 2030 Agenda is another area where we expect close cooperation with the Council of Europe.